

Poetry.

WHO SHALL ROLL AWAY THE STONS?

"And they said among themselves, who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away."—Mark 16: 3, 4.

What poor weeping ones were saying
Eighteen hundred years ago,
We, the same weak faith betraying,
Say in our sad hours of woe:
Looking at some trouble lying
In the dark and dread unknown,
We, too often, ask with sighing,
"Who shall roll away the stone?"

Thus with care our spirits crushing,
When they might from care be free,
And in joyous song outgushing,
Rise with rapture, Lord, to Thee—
For before the way was ended,
Oft we've had with joy to own,
Angels have from heaven descended,
And have rolled away the stone.

Many a storm cloud sweeping o'er us,
Never pours on us its rain;
Many a grief we see before us,
Never comes to cause us pain;
Ofttimes in the feared to-morrow,
Sunshine comes—the cloud has flown—
Ask then not in foolish sorrow,
"Who shall roll away the stone?"

Harden not thy soul with sadness,
Make a wiser, better choice;
Drink the wine of life with gladness—
God doth bid thee, man, rejoice,
In to-day's bright sunshine basking,
Leave to-morrow's fears alone;
Spoil not present joys by asking,
"Who shall roll away the stone?"

Contributions.

RELIGIOUS AUTONOMY.

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The above caption is used for the want of a better one to convey the idea of freedom, or independence, without any attempt at imitation. The individual is autonomous when he governs himself according to his own intelligence without any attempt to imitate others; a church is autonomous when she is governed by the pure word of God as understood by the light and intelligence of to-day, without any attempt to imitate the past or present church surroundings. The church of Christ should be governed by the principles and doctrines laid down by the Master himself, as understood by the intelligence of to-day without any regard for history, tradition or preconceived ideas. That the strong, popular churches of our time do not progress toward a better understanding of the plain literal truth of the Bible is altogether attributable to their adherence to the creeds, and dogmas formulated in past centuries. In everything else but religion, men and organizations of men have become autonomous; that is, they live and act regardless of the

traditions, superstitions, or methods of the past; they are conscious of the progress that has been made in the affairs of life, accept every advancement cheerfully, and eagerly anticipate still greater strides forward. Not so with the churches and theologians; they are largely content with the theories and dogmas of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; when here and there arises an independent thinker, who has the courage of his convictions, he is usually branded a heretic, not because his views are so widely different from those of his enlightened brethren, but because he has given public expression to their churches instead of judging as present light and knowledge would dictate, fall back upon their musty creeds or traditions to decide the questions. They are not free independent autonomous institutions of the present, but miserable imitations of the past.

It has often appeared strange to the writer, that aside from the Bible, nearly all the religious wisdom of the world was brought to light during the four centuries preceding the present. Not so much before and not so much since.

Among the clergy, now and then one undertakes to reform the creed of his church, but generally ignominiously fails. From the laity there are many deserters who join more obscure organizations because they reject creeds and stand squarely upon the Bible as they understand it. The latter are autonomous, but owing to the very general disregard of the literal text, very few get to the bed-rock of truth.

In the November Forum of 1893, under the caption of "*The Alienation of Church and People*," Prof. Chas. A. Briggs says: "We are living in the ebb tide of the Christian church." He further says: "Even the more advanced types of Protestantism have become stereotyped in the doctrines and methods of the eighteenth century." After referring to the many divisions of the church he says: "Where in all these heterogeneous forms of Christianity shall we find the divine institution of the church and the authority with which the church was endowed?" The Prof. finds a remedy for the decadence of the church ignoring the literal text of the Bible, and contends for dependence upon the Holy Ghost for guidance into all truth according to the developments of science and philosophy in these later days. While the eminent Prof. is of course in error, there is more consistency in his views than there is in those churches that are governed by creeds, two, three or four years old. He has as much right to deviate from the literal text as the creed-makers of the past, and has the advantage

of modern thought upon the subject. While the writer agrees with Prof. Briggs in the insufficiency of past thought for present emergencies. He contends that true progress can only be made by being guided both by the literal word, and the Holy Spirit, regardless of all the claims of science. (Science can have nothing to do with Omnipotence.) This is the kind of autonomy or self-government that is here contended for. If any deviation from the literal text is allowed at all, one is as good as the other as far as divine authority is concerned.

Religious autonomy is not only lacking in theology, but also in the application or inculcation of whatever is taught as the truth. There is among established churches not that adaptation to present conditions; not that independence, not that freedom from past methods which should be, in vulgar phrase, the church is not "up to date." In business and social life it is not so. The successful business man adapts himself to the conditions and requirements of to-day, he discards the methods of his father, grandfather, or slow neighbor. Just so with the church; if she means to grow and progress in proportion to the growth and progress of the world, she must be a complete autonomy, a complete self-government without regard to the past or to present surroundings. A simple adaptation to conditions and circumstances without any attempt at imitation. Old methods and measures need not be discarded because they are old. If they meet the requirements of to-day, they should be used without discrimination, if not, they should be dismissed in the same way.

All of the established churches aim to build their houses of worship in the more respectable parts of the cities, in as imposing style as circumstances will permit. That is all right as far as it goes; the rich and those in moderate circumstances should have churches to go to that measure up to their home comforts, but it never occurs to rich churches that they ought to build plain unassuming houses of worship in the less respectable localities among the poor and illiterate. Ostensibly churches are built for all classes, but practically they are built for the upper classes, only they are built in keeping with the sentimentalism of the past that in Christ all are equal, (would that it were so) none have yet become sufficiently independent and aggressive to adapt themselves to conditions as they find them and build churches for the rich, and churches for the poor in their respective localities. No doubt some will raise hands in holy horror at the idea here suggested, but that will not change the con-